



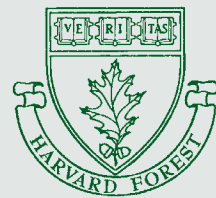
Public Conservation Funding in New England

An Overview of Recent Trends in Government Spending on Land Protection

Mary Buchanan, Highstead

Introduction

The Wildlands and Woodlands vision calls for a future in which the New England landscape is conserved strategically to maintain the natural infrastructure that supports healthy ecosystems, economies, and food systems. Achieving this vision will require considerable investment from many sources as well as new innovations in conservation finance. The purpose of this overview and the report that it summarizes is to synthesize trends in public conservation funding in New England from 2004-2014. It is our hope that this work will provide a foundation for action that will advance further funding and land protection in the future.



Wildlands & Woodlands

A Vision for the New England Landscape

Valpey Property in Dover, New Hampshire

(Photo: Dea Brickner-Wood, Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership)

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Please see www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/public-funding-report for a comprehensive list of contacts, programs, and data sources.

Federal Funding for Conservation in New England

Funds appropriated or awarded by the federal government have contributed substantially to permanent land conservation in New England. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is the primary vehicle for federal conservation funding in New England, contributing approximately 55-78% of the region's federal conservation funding every year from 2004-2014.¹ The LWCF applies revenues from non-renewable offshore energy development to multiple funding pools, including the Forest Legacy Program, which has protected over 1 million acres in New England. In 2015, the Land and Water Conservation Fund was allowed to expire for the first time in its 50-year history, and later was reauthorized for only three years. The long-term trajectory and fate of this fund will have strong ramifications for land protection in the region.

Within New England, individual states vary in how they utilize specific federal programs.

- Maine received over \$50 million in Forest Legacy Program appropriations from 2004-2014. This state stands out nationally for its Forest Legacy lands, as 29% of all acres protected by the Forest Legacy Program are within Maine's forests.
- Maine and Massachusetts received over 80% of the total North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funds awarded in the region.
- Approximately 82% of Wildlife Restoration Program (Pittman-Robertson) spending on land protection projects in the region took place in Massachusetts.
- New Hampshire accounted for almost 70% of the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund spending in the region.

These differences suggest that some New England states might have untapped opportunities for federal funding.

Funding from several programs, such as the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund and the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, declined or ceased altogether in New England in the latter part of this period. At a regional scale, notable declines in estimated totals for federal contributions occurred in 2008 and 2013. These trends suggest that New England conservationists must safeguard these funding streams for continued use in the region's future, and at the same time seek additional financing channels to ensure reliable and adequate resources to meet the Wildlands and Woodlands goal for conservation.

¹ Estimated federal totals do not include Natural Resource Conservation Service programs due to inadequate data. Some federal program totals are based on appropriations rather than expenditures.

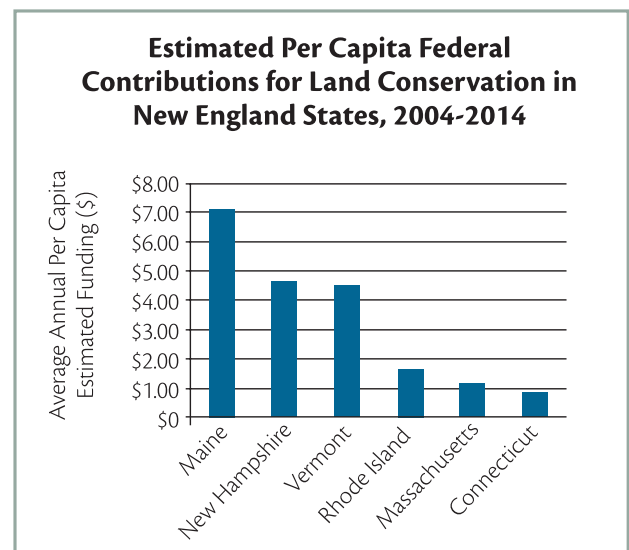
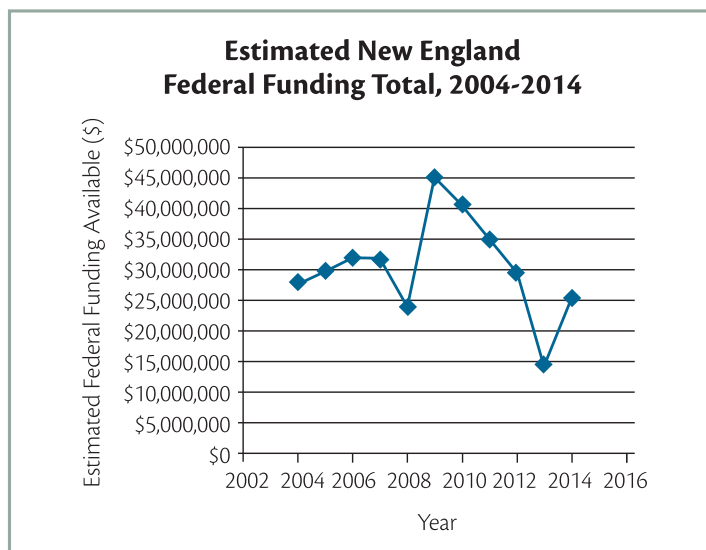
AT A GLANCE

- Our estimations for cumulative federal and state contributions to land conservation in New England totaled approximately \$973 million for the period from 2004-2014.
- The Land and Water Conservation Fund provided 55-78% of New England's federal conservation funding annually over the 2004-2014 period.
- Massachusetts led the region in state-level spending, accounting for 52% of total state conservation spending (2004-2014), while Vermont and Rhode Island invested the most on a per-capita basis. Connecticut is well below its conservation spending goals.
- State conservation funds, even when approved by voters, have been threatened, diverted, or withheld on multiple occasions, as in the cases of Connecticut's Community Investment Act, New Hampshire's Land and Community Heritage Investment Program, and Maine's Land for Maine's Future Program.
- As of 2014, total estimated combined state and federal funding for New England conservation had declined 48% from a peak in 2008.
- Local funding mechanisms like Massachusetts' Community Preservation Act exemplify replicable conservation innovations that could be applied to other New England states.



The following figures present estimated total federal contributions for land protection in New England states, an estimated regional trend, and estimated per capita funding by state.

State-by-State Breakdown of Estimated Federal Funds (NRCS Programs Not Included)						
Year	CT	ME	MA	NH	RI	VT
2014	\$ 4,926,397	\$ 10,613,300	\$ 3,523,969	\$ 5,755,000	\$ 0	\$ 2,059,500
2013	\$ 3,171,900	\$ 2,100,000	\$ 7,739,750	\$ 1,399,870	\$ 0	\$ 2,750,000
2012	\$ 1,777,583	\$ 11,725,500	\$ 1,974,250	\$ 9,158,206	\$ 383,017	\$ 710,000
2011	\$ 0	\$ 14,826,100	\$ 13,078,481	\$ 8,849,275	\$ 218,558	\$ 106,355
2010	\$ 4,322,916	\$ 12,456,581	\$ 6,548,753	\$ 7,229,692	\$ 2,200,650	\$ 6,370,000
2009	\$ 6,241,666	\$ 9,182,635	\$ 14,817,112	\$ 5,569,000	\$ 1,775,000	\$ 5,808,832
2008	\$ 5,572,979	\$ 6,423,371	\$ 6,760,273	\$ 2,584,000	\$ 1,283,333	\$ 3,116,137
2007	\$ 585,250	\$ 9,655,836	\$ 7,644,712	\$ 6,353,367	\$ 6,232,367	\$ 1,659,000
2006	\$ 2,306,500	\$ 9,692,296	\$ 9,404,451	\$ 7,977,509	\$ 2,342,124	\$ 1,307,000
2005	\$ 780,000	\$ 10,767,516	\$ 6,919,535	\$ 6,321,228	\$ 2,560,030	\$ 1,950,000
2004	\$ 3,189,843	\$ 6,526,074	\$ 4,345,000	\$ 6,160,823	\$ 2,070,087	\$ 5,150,000



State-Level Funding

Funding for state-level land conservation programs varies widely. In absolute terms, Massachusetts consistently led the region in state-level spending, accounting for 52% of the region's total. Vermont and Rhode Island invested the most on a per capita basis, spending an annual average of \$6.70 and \$5.31 per person, respectively, on land protection.

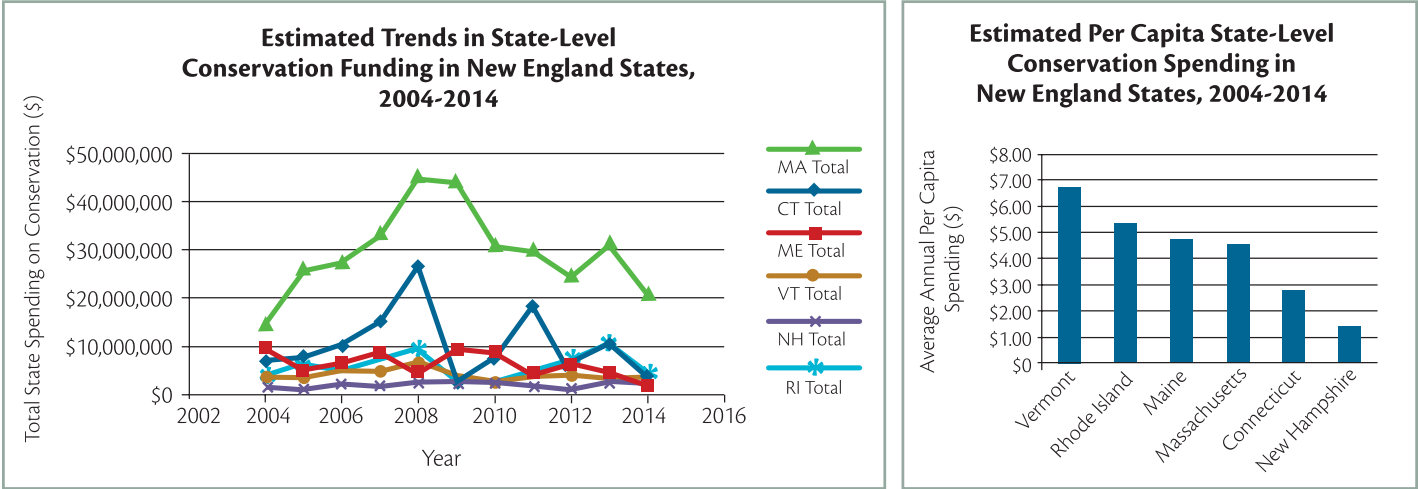
New England State	Funding Mechanisms for Primary State Conservation Programs
Connecticut	Legislative bonds; Community Investment Act
Maine	Voter-approved bonds
Massachusetts	Legislative bonds
New Hampshire	Fees on deed registries; legislative appropriations
Rhode Island	Voter-approved bonds
Vermont	Real estate transfer tax



Graf Farm in Pawlet and Rupert, Vermont (Photo: Vermont Land Trust)

In several states, conservation programs have been underfunded or undermined in recent years. Connecticut’s conservation spending record has fallen far short of the levels needed to meet the state’s goal of 21% of its acreage conserved by 2023. Connecticut’s Community Investment Act was also partially diverted to the state’s general fund for the 2016-2017 state budget. Similarly, New Hampshire’s LCHIP funding was diverted to other purposes on multiple occasions between 2004 and 2014, and did not receive its customary revenue in 2012 and 2013. In early 2015, Maine’s governor withheld over \$11 million in voter-approved bond funds for the Land for Maine’s Future Program, jeopardizing time-sensitive conservation projects. It is not enough just to increase funding to state conservation programs — the funds must also be protected from diversion and used for their intended purposes even in times of economic and political tension.

The following figures present total state-level spending on land protection in the New England states and per capita spending by state.



Flynt Quarry in Monson, Massachusetts (Photo: Ed Hood)

Federal and State Contributions Combined

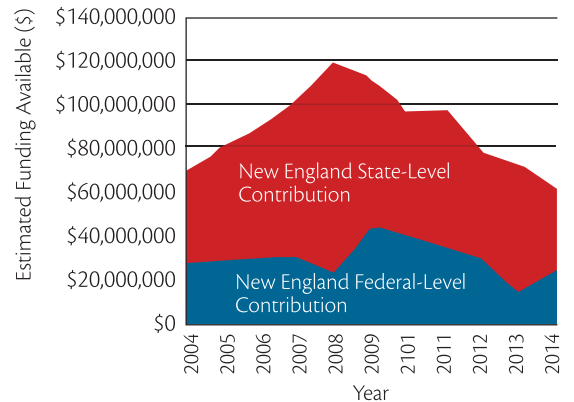
Our estimations for cumulative federal and state contributions to land conservation, summed for the region and rounded to the nearest million, totaled \$973,000,000 for the period from 2004-2014. As of 2014, the total estimated funding available for land protection in New England had declined approximately 48% from its peak in 2008.

The graph at right represents combined funding for land conservation at the federal and state levels for New England as a whole. The regional picture is heavily influenced by the trend in Massachusetts, in which state spending greatly outweighed federal spending. The following pie charts break the cumulative sum down by state and level of government.

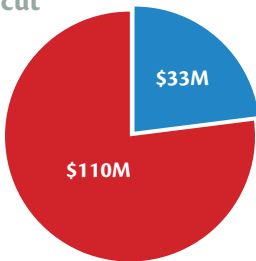
In the following graphs, federal contributions are represented in blue, state contributions in red. Contributions are summed for the period 2004-2014 and rounded to nearest million (M). NRCS programs are not included.

Many federal funding programs require a certain percentage of match funding from other sources. States with significant state-level funding available for conservation projects may be more attractive candidates for federal grants, allowing for additional financial leverage and capacity.

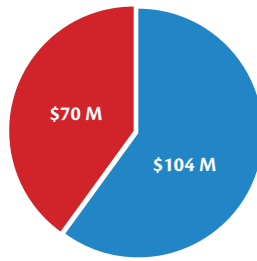
Estimated Combined Federal and State Conservation Funding in New England, 2004-2014



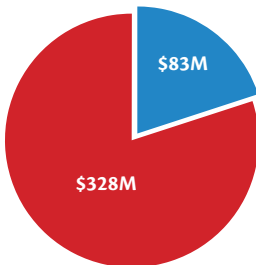
Connecticut
\$143 M



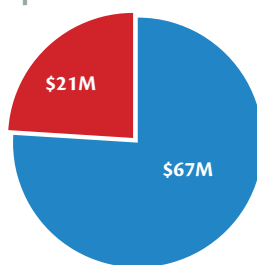
Maine
\$174 M



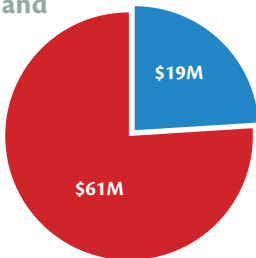
Massachusetts
\$411 M



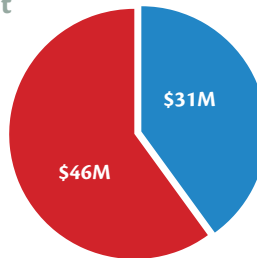
New Hampshire
\$88 M



Rhode Island
\$80 M



Vermont
\$77 M



Holman Conservation Area in Litchfield, Maine (Photo: Brian Kent, Kennebec Land Trust)

LOCAL FUNDING

Funding measures passed in individual municipalities can contribute greatly to the region's conservation effort, although relevant data are difficult to assemble. At the municipal level, Massachusetts is a standout example of strong conservation support. The exceptionally high level of local funding in Massachusetts is largely due to this state's Community Preservation Act (CPA). Since the act was signed into law in 2000, 160 of the 351 municipalities in Massachusetts have voluntarily adopted CPA by ballot vote, allowing these towns to raise money for open space and recreation, historical preservation, and affordable housing through a surcharge on local property taxes. Participating CPA municipalities, in addition to benefiting from steady and strengthened local funding capacity, also become eligible to access matching state funds.



Learn More

You can access the full report, Public Conservation Funding in New England: Recent Trends in Government Spending on Land Protection, online at www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org/public-funding-report. There you'll find:

- A regional overview identifying the key programs bringing federal conservation dollars to New England
- State-by-state comparisons that highlight where and how public funds are being used to protect land
- Trends in farmland preservation funding in each New England state
- Individual state summaries including state-level programs, funding mechanisms, and recent spending trends
- A full list of data sources and methodology notes



Curtis Homestead Conservation Area in Leeds, Maine (Photo: Jane Davis)



Shed Pond in Readfield and Manchester, Maine. (Photo: Norm Rodrigue)